

# OXFORD POETRY

1925

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BASIL BLACKWELL

# OXFORD POETRY

1925

EDITED BY PATRICK MONKHOUSE  
AND CHARLES PLUMB

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## BY WAY OF PREFACE

**B**OOTLESS it were gratuitously to re-embark upon that unseaworthy old vessel, the problem of representation. A year ago, to be sure, the hulk was manned and put to sea by this poor annual's hardier critics, amid much bedizenment of verbal bunting and not a little semi-serious grape-shot. A gale ruffled Oxford teacups; a staid metropolitan journal stirred in the whiff and wind thereof. The collection was utterly unrepresentative of Oxford—or of the best Oxford; again, perfectly representative—or of the worst. The editors discreetly announced that, anyway, it wasn't meant to be; and the burgeoning tumult perished as in a nipping frost. Ourselves, we have always felt that an anthology should have a polemic, a core, a relationship prior to the bare contiguity of page. Such a nucleus may be supplied merely by unity of taste; of time, or subject; of purpose, like the greatest of all anthologies, Dr Bridges' 'Spirit of Man.' Here, we have had to start with no more than a geographical kinship: nor have we striven to maintain the idle paradox, that a common habitat implies a common outlook. And so any spiritual oneness, which critics may detect in this number, is to be regarded, or disregarded, as fortuitous. Out of a deal of copy, we have diligently drawn all such as seemed, of its kind, worthy. And the outcome of this should be that few will find nothing to content, everyone plenty to displease them. Only let no aggrieved author exclaim against us, 'I sent them in a

## BY WAY OF PREFACE

dozen, and they chose the worst.' The laugh is against him. But, indeed, it is hard for any man to exercise a taste more catholic than his own. Convince yourself that Pope, or Whitman, or Maro, is the only poet, and you are disqualified as a judge of the excellence, in his own line, of any pygmy who does not flock the banners of the appropriate giant. And where we have ventured out of our secure provinces into the regions of guesswork in taste, we would assure our readers that we have chosen 'in meer simplicitie, and all for their delight.'

To Mr Gerald Duckworth we owe our thanks for permission to reprint Mr Acton's poems from *An Indian Ass*; also to Mr Basil Blackwell for Mr Greene's poems from *Babbling April*. Divers others of these poems have appeared in *The Weekly Westminster*, *The Oxford Outlook*, and *Poetry of To-day*.

Finally, to make something of a dedication: and there an end. An editor is, after all, a builder with other people's bricks, and there is little enough of our own labour in this building for us to be so presumptuous as to dedicate. Still, for what our service has been worth, we should like to inscribe it, in all deference and affection, to Harold Acton, beloved and magnanimous *duce* of poets, and our predecessor in this pleasant office. Would that we had been able to make it worthier.

P. J. M.

C. T. P.

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## HAROLD ACTON

### HILARITY

C O M E, let us sing the world's hilarity,  
Now that a silence overspreads the hills,  
Each crevice, muscle, wimpling in a haze,  
Blue-ragged fustian of twilight: come  
And crack the sky with laughter, mounting shrill,  
Let it dissolve the æther, let it break  
In bubbles, circles ever-bosoming,  
As when a trout has troubled a still pool.

Scatter it like a hungry pack of hounds,  
Worry and tear and grind it into strips,  
Ravish and tread on it, then let it be  
To crawl before us like the ooze of oil,  
A worm of shame, a mean and squamous thing.

Hysteria, guide us! Let our laughter heave,  
Swell shriek on shriek, till it engender fear  
Like peacocks in abandoned palaces  
Whose sharp and melancholy discords ring  
And rinselike lightning through the vaulted roofs  
At sunset hour, when skies are smeared with blood.  
Come, drown the viol's pallid amber notes,  
Submerge the fevered pluckings at the lute,  
Let no soft rippling cadences be spilled,  
But beat a riot out upon the drums.  
Fescennine gongs shall kindle us to blaze,  
And thus our fumes, well ballasted, will steer  
Towards the placid stars and make them reel.

## HILARITY

Our lives are cratered with great pocks and scabs,  
Meticulously morselled into pangs,  
Birth-scream, death-rattle, straggling years between  
Of childhood and uneasy puberty,  
Of adolescence and maturity,  
Resolve tormented into slow decay,  
Crabbed, agued, rheumatic, cough our lives away.  
And some, less fortunate, cough up their blood.

Then let us sing the world's hilarity!  
With plunging pistons let our laughter press,  
Lumbering in massed squadrons, vitriol  
To blister the anæmic orb of moon.  
And there are many hours before the dawn.  
The hilewort, nightshade, agrimony-wand  
Surrender to the fingers of the breeze,  
Lay bare their throats, let loose their floating hair.

Some luckless women bear their children blind  
And some hare-lipped and others lunatick  
With soft and fumbling brains and shifting eyes,  
Who dandle curly flowers, their lolling tongues  
Clicking and moist with unrestrained saliva.  
Perhaps 'twere better that they were born blind,  
Never to see the ugliness of man,  
The mirrors of his noisome, clammy thoughts,  
Like night-grown fungi pushing on the air,  
But hold sweet music palpable, and sounds,  
Tones, undertones: a paradise of hues,

## HILARITY

And glowing forms in silk embroideries.  
The silence, too, will seem a rhythmic motion,  
A saraband for snow-white feet to tread,  
And not a tortured cripple crouching low  
Amongst the blotting shadows of his soul,  
To nurse his agony with evil oaths,  
The blight-scarred sickly vapours of remorse,  
Sputtered and writhing from his twisted lips.

Were a revolver fired with loud report,  
The only music welcome to our ears,  
The poor blind man would tremble, clutch a chair . . .

Day after day the limbs of man are gnawed  
And flayed by every manner of disease,  
Eaten of lice, they seem the spawn of slugs,  
And cancer slowly scrabbles at their vitals.  
The small-pox ploughs their faces into ruts  
And scurvy furrows, strange deformities  
Distend and hunch them into monstrous shapes,  
Like shadows gripping at realities,  
To scrape a livid grave amongst the slime.  
Some calcined ashen white with leprosy  
Will scream for terror at their dreadful hands,  
The touch of which would seem to cause decay  
The roots they tear, the pappy fruit they pluck,  
And prowling beasts will turn in haste and flee  
Before their weary footsteps through the night.

## HILARITY

Our quickened hearts have grated on themselves,  
We groin with lapped morphews of the mind,  
Our wanton mirth has frozen into sorrow,  
And we had thought to fashion of our joy  
Round crackling pearls to pelt our wine-drenched  
loves.

But we were to have sung hilarity!

Our clowns are turned into tragedians,  
And Pierrot's chalk-white face is crinkled up  
With bitter weeping; roguish Harlequin,  
His apple cheeks all wet and blobbed with tears,  
Wanders the streets of Bergamo alone.  
And floating through the utter silences,  
Our sobs well hugely, spasms echoing  
To jeer and mock at us, abortive fools,  
Who came to sing the world's hilarity.

## HAROLD ACTON

### IN THE MONTH OF ATHYR<sup>1</sup>

THESE ruins seem a womb of cringing air,  
So thin that the ears tingle, flickering,  
And every barren plant is withering,  
Ready to snap, like glass, for sheer despair . . .  
And through the ether mountains loom like bones  
So hollow you could scrape a melody  
Sounding like water from them, oozily  
To this sun-stricken desert-world of groans.  
The light is cruel: it is hard to read  
The letters on these stones, but, lo, the words:  
'*Lord Jesus Christ*' and further '*soul*'; what birds  
Erased the script with droppings? and what weed  
Has wrested from these crevices a home?  
'*In month of Athyr*' . . . '*Lucius fell asleep*' . . .  
His age is mentioned: he was young; and deep  
Beneath the damaged parts, as in a foam  
Of centuries I see, disfigured, '*tears*.'  
Then '*tears*' again, '*for us his friends who weep*' . . .  
Lucius was much beloved, it appears.  
In grey November . . . Lucius fell asleep . . .

<sup>1</sup>The ancient Egyptian November (derived from a poem by C. P. Cavafy).

## HAROLD ACTON

### THE PRODIGAL SON

THE young man yawned with feigned inconsequence

Of manner; boredom exquisite; a fence  
To hide the quick explosions in his soul.  
He sucked at his surroundings, and the whole  
Grim agony of his dull youth returned,  
The blue fins of his sullen eyelids burned,  
He could have mouthed a curse, an oath obscene:  
For horror at the glib familiar scene  
A clayey lump stuck blistered in his throat.  
Chrysallic faces, garlic, myosote,  
And rows of beans and artichokes, a field  
Interminably patterned, jigged and reeled  
Along the corridors of memory.

‘Is childhood happy? dismal fallacy!  
And yet I am not one of those who think  
That lilies smell not, orange-flowers stink.’  
Here had the best hours coolly leaked away  
Like dribblets from a tap, a disarray  
Of tumbled hispid stars; a clean dry sleep  
Of stunted senses, where he could not weep  
For ignorance. And ever shone the moon;  
The warm sky twinkled like a chopped lagoon.  
‘This world is but a foggy circumstance,’  
He thought, ‘where timid mortals must advance  
To claim their rights and drain what cup of joy  
It has to offer, now no longer boy  
I’ll cease to play the rôle of Tantalus,

## THE PRODIGAL SON

But leave this place, discharge a blunderbuss  
Against my present drawling mode of life.  
I'm still too young to bear the plague of wife,  
And though 'tis true when all fine things be said,  
I'm welcome to a partner for my bed,  
To kiss a gaping throat of flaccid silk;  
I fear her plump white breasts would hold no milk  
To suckle babes on, after I had done  
With kissing at her nipples; one by one  
Each new-born babe would wither up and die.'

He picked his teeth, and fetched a windy sigh,  
Informed his father of his bold resolve,  
Who told him of the cost it would involve:  
So, settling up accounts, he bade farewell  
To all the damned of his domestic hell.

Oh *wagon-lits* and tickets bought from Cook's,  
Surpassing all the fairy-tales in books!  
Warm exhalations, streets with spicy smells  
And oh, the Poe-like harmonies of bells!  
Venice and Ruskin and *The Deadly Lamps*,  
The pulsing cafés and patchouli'd vamps  
With sticky flowers in their copper hair,  
The languid music throbbing on the air!  
The Watteau *fêtes galantes*, the bistre-brown  
Sombrero'd poets; yet without a crown  
To purchase food; the graceful unwashed hands  
And flung-proud gestures of these Southern lands!  
The tiny shiny shoes with pointed tips

## THE PRODIGAL SON

And carmine-rouged pursed petulance of lips!  
But all the while the young man's pockets burned,  
And all the while he piteously yearned  
For lucre; many azure nights he'd lain  
With shirt-front soaked and squelching in champagne  
And pleasures, money, all are volatile,  
For after belching Pol-Roger the bile  
Will wreak revenge.

And thus it came about  
That when his full supply had given out,  
The harlots would no longer share his bed;  
Since he could pay no cash, they, laughing, said:  
'One sucks the orange, throws away the peel.'  
The young man's vanity forbade him kneel  
As penitent before his father's glare,  
Before the well-staged patronising stare  
Of his familiar family—poor things—  
How they would love to clip his phoenix-wings!

So he became a labourer and slept  
In musty garrets where the grey mice crept,  
With cobwebs and the gibbering of bats  
And scuttling cockroaches, and lice, and rats  
Who dragged their heavy bellies on the floor  
Thud, thud and thud; the creaking of the door  
In twilight cavernous, the broken pane  
Through which the hiss and crackle of the rain  
Would slant in rivulets across the planks,  
The thunder tramped, the lightning played his pranks



## THE PRODIGAL SON

Like a young leopard prancing from the skies  
Divinely, whilst the tough wind slapped its thighs.

Through dismal days he sweated at the plough.  
And half a crust beneath an apple-bough  
Became his nourishment, and so he thinned  
In figure-line; the sweltering east wind  
And thick-flamed sun had bronzed his body quite . . .  
And often through the oozing hours of night  
He'd sing a sparkling catch of better times—  
No longer pedant à propos of rhymes,  
He'd hum or whistle: 'Gosh, she looks immense,  
You never met a girl like sweet Hortense,'  
With genuine emotion in his throat.  
But soon he was reduced to pawning coat  
And hat; dismissed for superflux of dreams  
Or bathing on hot afternoons in streams  
When there was corn to reap, or hay to store  
In soporific barns; and all the more  
He dreamt of silken harlots, velvet wine.  
A tender farmer let him tend the swine.

With weighty flanks well caked in slime, a sow  
Grunted and suckled farrow, whilst a cow  
Lowd like a mellow snore; a mastiff whined  
To demonstrate sheer vacancy of mind.  
'Shall I arise and go?' 'tis not too late  
To gain an entrance to my father's gate.'  
The young man shook his head and muttered 'No,  
Nor shall arise, nor to my father go.'  
He had acquired a preference to dine  
On scraps amongst the confidential swine.

W. J. ARKELL

UNDER A WILTSHIRE HEDGE

THE great hedge rises in silent towers  
Of crab-bloom, pink against the snowy clouds;  
On the high bank starry celandine crowds,  
In a lilac mist of cuckoo-flowers.  
Look through the gap, with apple-blossom fringed,  
Over the April woods to the far blue downs,  
Here and there in the changing sea of browns  
The elms shew green, and young oaks purple-tinged.  
Down the breeze comes a thrush's song of love,  
Chanted deep in the hazels by the pond  
And the song from the catkin-covered wand  
Is answered in the blossom sprays above.  
A rustle in the silver-poplar trees,  
Like wavelets rushing up a shingly strand,  
A silver glint of sun as each is fanned,  
And waves and whitens with the passing breeze.  
Gentle gusts go by, and others follow;  
They flutter, sweet and scented, on the face,  
Then down the daisy-dotted meadow race  
To the kingcups in the golden hollow . . .  
'Tis all so lovely, I could linger here  
The long day through until the eventide,  
Till the cool shadows lengthen far and wide,  
And the barn owl hoots from the thicket near:  
I'd see the fox cubs from the hedgerow creep,  
Still watch the blossoms falling, soft and pink, .  
When the last roan cow wanders down to drink,  
And leaves the melting landscape sunk in sleep.

ARTHUR BRAINE-HARTNELL

PUSE DOWN—SUNSET

**H**E said: 'Look there.' Oh, that my heart could tell  
And it be lost not to the years of Time.  
The mist has risen up and left my rhyme;  
She is too delicate a miracle.  
The red moon—  
A young slip—and every star,  
More faint than night stars are,  
Was hid too soon.  
A car came up the road,  
Making a little dawn upon the hill,  
And broke the vision that the clouds bestowed.  
It's broken still.

DWELLERS IN THE SEA

**M**Y soul is some leviathan in vague distress  
That travels up great slopes of hills beneath the sea.  
Up from the darkness and the heaviness  
Into a slowly gathering radiancy.  
But wiser now, alas! to plunge and swim away;  
For if he burst upon that mystic light of day,  
Leviathan must gasp in lack of breath  
And find what dwellers in the sea call death.  
We hapless dwellers in the sea cannot be told,  
No brave leviathan has ever back returned  
To tell us how stupendous mountains rolled  
Like porpoises, beneath a sky that burned,  
How unimaginable light along his scales  
Changed colour, till Leviathan was mailed in glory.  
We have but rumours, unsubstantial tales;  
And who would give his life up for a story?

J. F. COURAGE

SUNLIGHT THROUGH A CHESTNUT-TREE

DOWN in the leaves, fluctuant, floating,  
The white light webs and chases'  
Green-lit bough and blue-lit blossom,  
Laces and traces  
Over our faces  
A thousand, sudden, spectral paces ;

And wakes in me—that penetrative light—  
Blind ante-natal dreams,  
Things half-remembered, caught-at, lost,  
Renascent gleams,  
Swift-falling beams  
Of light on older hills and streams ;

As one may see in a green, deep pool  
Dusk and clear light  
Constant merging, constant changing,—  
Quieter than twilight,  
Closer than night,  
Yet without substance, seen without sight . . .

And after all, the world is small  
Beneath a chestnut-tree.  
Perhaps there's only you and me,—  
Extraordinary me  
Extraordinarily  
Lying in light beneath a chestnut-tree.

## CECIL DAY-LEWIS

### SONNET

NOW, heart, be strong. Strip off, if there is any  
Rag left of the peacock dress that once you wore:  
Stand up, arrayed in finer verity.  
Am I no better than the commonest zany  
That I should preen and posture thus before  
The mirror of my own stupidity?  
Should stop my ears to rose and river telling  
How beauty lives but in the hour of birth,  
Then, by its very changelessness grows plain?  
Laugh, world, or weep. He's gone beyond recalling  
The boy who saw God in thy meanest earth.  
O, to have back those lying days again,  
When starry, chaotic night that is our youth  
Had not yet paled into a dawn of truth.

CECIL DAY-LEWIS

AUTUMN OF THE MOOD

ON the heart's hidden verge  
To mark where love is buried  
Mourner lilies spring  
Out of the stunted spurge,  
And a small wind sings dirge  
Under the last leaves fluttering

This autumn of the mood  
Lives not beyond the rustle  
Of its own leaves falling,  
And soon, where lilies stood,  
Brittle stalks in the wood  
Shiver, like spectres at cock-calling.

# JAMES FERGUSON

## NIGHT FLOWERS

THE tall-stemmed candles brighten: the long room—  
The hushed and shadowed chamber—fills  
With radiance, as they burst the shredded gloom.  
And in the table's gleaming round,  
Far in its brown depths, luminous and cool,  
Lie mirrored the pale saffron flames, that bloom  
Like stately flowers, yellow-crowned,  
By the dark waters of some peat-hued pool  
Deep set among the heather-mantled hills.

O delicate blossoms, pallid daffodils  
Born from the fiery heart of an unknown sun!  
Not for a wonted season, not to the ultimate  
Days of spring  
Shall you endure, till the pulses of April quicken,  
And a passionate May fulfils  
The promise of flowering:  
For midnight gathers, the long hours wait,  
The shadows thicken—  
Darkness will pluck you, flowers, one by one.



## GRAHAM GREENE

### I SHALL BE HAPPY

I SHALL be happy again, when you are gone,  
Happy as the insentient stone,  
Feeling no rain, nor any sun that shone.

And beauty will return again to common things,  
And firmness to the heart's resolvings.  
No fear will haunt the drift of fancyings.

The sunset will again be set of sun,  
Loose hair, the hair undone,  
And night, light's strands unspun.

But oh, in all my awkward swordsman's fence,  
Knowing not whither nor whence  
The sword flash from the mind, this difference.

I shall be happy again as the senseless stone,  
But there will be gone  
The zest from rain, all gold the past sun shone.

And beauty will return again to common things,  
No unrest in the heart's resolvings.  
No hope will haunt the drift of fancyings.

The sunset will be only set of sun,  
Loose hair, the hair undone,  
And night, light's strands unspun.

## GRAHAM GREENE

### SONNET

ALL these belong to youth; all these I hate:  
The constant dreams that change and interchange,  
Taking the whole world in a little range,  
Yet creeping up to bed when it grows late;  
And short-lived loves that yet are over strong,  
When all the mind is one old weary faction,  
Fearful of peace, more fearful still of action,  
Fighting beneath no banner, with no song.

But age is like a wreck within a bay;  
The sails are down: they do not feel the wind;  
There comes no whisper from a foolish Spain;  
The wheel is broken: there's no course to lay;  
Only the sunlight like a fish gold-finned  
Gleams through the water, laughs, is gone again.

IMMORTALITY

**I**S this our immortality?—to sow.  
In eagerness with joyous morning hands  
A crop whose harvest yield we may not know,  
Only pass by the sunset-glowing lands  
And linger there like children, bedtime come,  
Then go, like them, reluctantly to sleep.  
There will be talking when our lips are dumb,  
And laughter at the feasts we shall not keep,  
And sometime in the dark a voice will call  
On one of our dead names; we shall not hear.  
All that we were in life has passed to heirs  
Unwitting of their heritage. They fall  
In ruts and furrows we too learnt to fear;  
We cannot warn them. All we were is theirs.

R. W. KETTON-CREMER

LIFE-IN-DEATH

I

WHAT if a man waking from troubled sleep,  
Dazzled with strange light burning through the gloo  
Should try in fear to shield his eyes—and feel  
The linen swathing-bands  
More strong than unrelenting steel  
Hold to his sides the clutching, shuddering hands?

What if this man were lying deep  
Not in the unplumbed catacombs of sleep  
But in some dark place hollowed for the dead?

*There comes no earthly glimmer in the tomb.*

No earthly glimmer: but . . . if this light were shed  
From something not of earth, nor quite of Death—  
Some phantom Life-in-Death—  
Would he not pray to be as the other dead,  
Pray with chill gasping breath  
No more in that grim place to linger on  
With no faint hope that one  
Might hear his cries thin-sounding through the mould  
and stone?

# LIFE-IN-DEATH

## II

OR would he lie there quietly, thinking  
That through his window shone the waning moon  
Down in the western sky sinking,  
About to plunge into the mists uprising  
And turn their pallid coils to gold: that soon  
Cocks will be crowing and challenging over the land,  
Folk moving in the house and thrushes singing,  
Rooks flying off to the fields in a noisy band—  
And he would hear them?

Would this thought keep ringing  
A joyous peal of bells in his crazed head  
Till the light, fading to a little gleam,  
Died—till he too was as the other dead:  
Dead: yet not disenchanted of this dream?

R. W. KETTON-CREMER

EPITAPH OF THE FORMAL POET

**I** WHO lie here alone,  
Rain plashing on my stone,  
Loved the slow swell and chime  
Of measured rhyme.

Rhyming the raindrops fall,  
Singing some madrigal,  
Tavern-catch, girl's light song . . .  
All the night long.

JOSEPH GORDON MACLEOD

ELEGY ON A BANK CLERK DROWNED  
IN THE SEA

(Inscribed to Keith Douglas)

**I**F a great pine mountain wave came rumbling in  
Across the bay on us, we would not have the time  
To run away: nor if the sea  
Gathered in pleated skirts, and spread out further,  
Would these our little footsteps valiant be  
To carry us back to the dipping line  
Of cliffs there which the settling sunbeams turn to pink.

It was here that they found him.  
Wet and disturbed, with the clammy folds of his summer overcoat  
Lapping upon the frozen wind-bars of the sand  
Like seaweed, like a great and swaying sponge.  
Still in his clutching hand  
A walking-stick was held, and at his throat  
A tattered tie, where the grim dog-fish had been nibbling, swayed  
In time with the swaying ripples  
That on his hair and forehead played  
As though with soothing fingers that old charlatan the sea,  
Turned somewhat sentimental, had been trying  
To mesmerise his body into stone,  
White chalk-stone, on which hair and silk and tweed  
Could simulate the weed,

## ELEGY ON A BANK CLERK

And his thin finger-nails turn into limpet shells  
At Ocean's old command,  
On his stiff body, rocked alone,  
Rocked alone and solitary, lying  
In all that desert of thin-plastered sand.

He took train here, that here he might be dead.  
All in a morning it was done.  
He left his house in the great city after breakfast, while  
the sun  
Still had the bedclothes over his debauched and tousled  
head;  
Knowing but known to none,  
He took train here: and swam to sea  
With shoes and overcoat, as far as he could swim;  
And who shall say what curious dog-fish smelt and fol-  
lowed him?

Right round the cape he came; alive or dead he came:  
Perhaps he swam: perhaps it was long after he was  
drowned  
That his still moving body  
Like a strange motor-boat propelled by nothing put-  
tered round  
The headland. And who knows whether by day  
Or night, beams caught the unresponsive ray  
Of his unclosing eyes? where no flame burned  
Nor was there tripod neither hearth to house the flame  
When they discovered him. Perhaps some monstrous  
fish,



## ELEGY ON A BANK CLERK

Never been seen by fisher or by bather,  
Found in those phosphorescent eyes a tasty dish?  
Or that old solemn cormorant  
Who sits like a well-sited statue carved in black,  
Some poet or fine statesman with curyed back,  
By day (and night as well if we could see)  
Upon the outmost rock, dived for his eyes, and did not  
know  
What jewels she was picking.  
Or yet perhaps his clothes and face and hands were  
prattled o'er  
By some thin shoal of little things,  
The whole crowd hardly licking  
The lacquer from his skin, accustomed to clean so  
The seawrack and the jetsam of the shore.

He took the train in the early morning: and before the  
sun had mounted  
Half to his throne, this boy was wasted.  
Shame it may be, or grief of soul—  
(He could not answer all for which he ought to have  
accounted)  
Purchased his ticket for him. He had tasted  
Too bitterly the marmalade of life:  
This was the toll  
Peace asked of him before she let him pass.

He was too gentle to be criminal, alas!  
What were his thoughts as the train brought him here?

## ELEGY ON A BANK CLERK

He dared not think of cows and forests flashing  
Past the square window: otherwise  
He would have raved, or else repented.  
Rather he turned his eyes  
Inward for ever, till the terror of his soul was tented  
Under the canvas of oblivion: and his fear  
Turned to self-love.  
How strange that not the splashing,  
Not the cold sheets he cuddled into when he left the  
    shore,  
Not the unsteady depths he kissed and crawled upon,  
Could turn the cover back that shut him over,  
It was so little, the disgrace  
That would have made him blush a little, then forget,  
They would have tried him, and forgotten  
After a month only the plain weakness of his face  
But even why they should remember him. And yet  
Now his face has turned leprous with the fish-bites and  
    sea-puss  
And his fleshed breasts are rotten.  
Why did he thus cut off his heart to spite his brain?  
—But let us turn again:  
Let us go back to the encircling rocks and dress our-  
    selves.  
Let our bare feet feel the bare ribs of golden sand  
That keep us up. If only this fair bay had life,  
We might lie on its warmest bosom, and  
Finger its smooth and undulating shoulder:  
For we have warmth and life.

## ELEGY ON A BANK CLERK

But not so long ago he was laid there,  
The ugly on the fair,  
And on her lifeless unresisting side  
The balance of the tide  
Carried his breathless body to her bed:  
Drugged on her unturned neck his heavy head  
Sprinkling her skin with hair  
Fell. Than such a lifeless pair  
What heedlessness were colder?

JOSEPH GORDON MACLEOD  
HUGIN'S SONG

From 'Odin and Gunnlöd'

[Hugin was the Bird of Memory, who sat by Odin's right hand].

TWOFOLD her grace is:

Over the silent hills she smiles  
And in forgotten places  
Where the drowsy bleating sheep  
Slowly tell the lazy miles,  
And in muffled grasses deep  
Cigals sleep.

Squirrels seek their leafy hold  
Where the lonely women weep.

Low goes the bee:

Slow bends the tree:

Where the reindeer chased of old  
The rabbit chases.

Or, amid ice despairing white

Her rugged race is:

Where bleak the rock rattles, and black.

The river's pale green jade of light

Cleaves the blocks beyond its track:

Crack to crack

Spreads tumbling blankets on the floe:

Then as the silence closes quite

Between the rocks

An ice crone mocks

For ever forgetting where beneath the snow

The dead man's face is.

Twofold her grace is.

JOSEPH GORDON MACLEOD

MAUD ANSWERED

**I***t is I who have come to bury you, bury you  
Deeper, ever so little deeper.*

For see! I have come with wax and herbs,  
Unguents of rhyme and rich emplasters  
To embalm this fair dead body of love,  
To preserve it against the creeper  
Time, who disturbs  
Even the wooden cell, against death and all disasters

You who were never a quiet sleeper  
Shall at last have a grave that is deep enough.  
Rigid below my preparations  
Which from my caressing fingers  
Drop and the perfume lingers  
After the nostrils are closed,—  
Which with caressing fingers of verse  
I have gently spread along your body:  
As I fix you, so shall you remain.

And whether you suffered pleasure  
Or exulted in your pain,  
Whether you loved or laughed  
At all, I make no regard.  
Your love would have been like your laughter, hard  
And hard for ever shall either be  
In these funny little tags I make for you.

Dust into dust:  
Trust into trust:  
So love goes into its coffin

## MAUD ANSWERED

Like a baby into a bath.  
And long after they have forgotten  
The things you said or sang  
They shall know you very well  
Because of the songs I pounded up for you.

Softly, softly shall you be hammered down,  
And with a rhyme in every nail  
Stiffly shall you lie, unalterable  
Like a fast-fixed rail,  
As I have fixed you:  
(And yet no less inflexible than you were to me)  
Deeper now than you lie, poor sleeper,  
Deeper, far deeper.

PATRICK MONKHOUSE  
MIDLAND LANDSCAPE

Observed from a third-class corridor of the L.M.S.

THE hay was falling swathed and ranked  
In fields that swept my window by;  
The train ran on, the couplings clanked.  
Under a grave and clouded sky  
I pondered melancholily.

It was not that I loved the less  
This bright strange world that you were in;  
That thinking on your loveliness  
Had torn from common things the skin  
Of an enchantment wearing thin.

I thought not on you; yet you were  
About me, with me, and at one,  
Informing every here and there,  
Illuminating, like the sun,  
The whole of your dominion.

The vivid world (as in a trance)  
Flashed much obtrusive on my view;  
Weighed with unused significance—  
It was the world whereof were you.  
All this and more than this I knew;

For cows and chapels, lanes and leas,  
Knew you among us; and the day  
Broke into smiling sun; the trees  
Bowed to you, as you went your way  
About the hedges and the hay.

## PATRICK MONKHOUSE

### TEMPERAMENTAL INCOMPATIBILITY

HAD I the heart to call you a damned fool,  
To know that you and I would never do  
Being together all the long day through:  
Lay down the thought of you, as I would a tool  
That grew too hot to handle, or too cool;  
Rid me of this incorrigible you  
Whose image looms importunate on the view,  
Divinely gross, damnably beautiful—  
Then, I'd be still; and never heed the wings  
Of Eros flying over me; I'd hear  
Green lapping silences and echoes pearled,  
The stars' talk and the planets' whisperings,  
Such stillness would there be . . . But oh, my dear,  
God help us, it would be a poorer world.



## CHARLES PLUMB

### BRASENOSE OLD QUAD—MIDNIGHT

‘And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob’s thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go except thou bless me.’—*Genesis xxxii, 24.*

#### I. THE HOUR STRIKES

##### I

THE spectral hours fall  
From Time’s sepulchral womb.  
Behind our ancient wall,  
Grim like the tower of doom  
That zones our life and all,  
They are gathered to their tomb;  
Unfettered into gloom  
They shiver out and fall

##### 2

Each to his station vowed  
The stars are carpeted  
Within a pall of cloud,  
But writhe, as, it is said  
This hour, each in his shroud,  
A shudder shakes the dead;  
They nod corrupted head,  
And gibber half aloud.

## BRASENOSE OLD QUAD

### 3

O elemental fear  
In spangled robes! Your rush  
From pole to pole I hear.  
Your sombre pinions brush  
The threshold of mine ear,  
With tones that hautboys gush  
In ocean-springs, where flush  
Of day come never near.

### 4

What did I tremble for?  
The silence keeps no sound.  
Yet from the inmost core  
Of heaven, the darkness found  
A voice. A seraph bore  
His wings to the profound;  
Or else 'twas hautboys drowned  
The hard beat of an oar.

### 5

Even the unsounded well  
Of eldest night doth float  
Such echoes out, to tell  
That over heaven's moat,  
To storm that citadel,  
Crawls Time's slow spell-bound boat,  
Whose oarage dimly smote  
The void insensible.

## BRASENOSE OLD QUAD

### 6

It is too leaden, the thought  
Of Time's slow mastery:  
It numbs the veins, that fraught  
With wisdom though we be,  
Time bears us past our port  
Out to a tideless sea,  
And all our empery  
Must shiver into nought.

### 7

Our empery of might  
And cognisance, and dreams,  
With showers and sunlight,  
Steamers and quinqueres,  
And pity, and delight  
In books and football-teams,  
Be jetsam on the streams,  
Oblivious, unrequite.

## II. THE VISION DAMNABLE

### 8

OUT, out beyond this core,  
These fair but sombre walls,  
In Time's train I will soar,  
And pass into his halls  
Of granite, with a floor  
Of skulls, and seneschals  
Time-grey at every door,  
To guard them from footfalls.

## BRASENOSE OLD QUAD

9

Here range but images:  
No half-articulate throats  
Gibe down the passages,  
Mid ghosts of frogs and goats,  
And gods, that shake their knees,  
Nor the squat vampire gloats,  
But on the salt air floats  
A mirage of all these

10

Death's unreality  
Teems in the prisoned space.  
Lo, that eternity,  
Death, dusted in his place,  
As lustless gargoyles be.  
The throne of Death enlace  
Ygdrasil's roots, that tree  
That shadows land and sea,  
And moulders there apace.

11

And couched in weary lust  
The sodden twilights through  
Sits Time with Death's disgust  
Enraptured; till they grow  
Breeds fetid with distrust  
And agony, and woe,  
Of men that never know  
Their parentage of dust.

## BRASENOSE OLD QUAD

12

Ay, therefore 'tis this drear  
Disgust upon the night  
Has furrowed me with fear.  
For Time and Death grow white  
Together to their bier,  
That twin-birth did unite,  
When brooded God's foul kite  
Upon the waters sheer.

13

And Time, diseased old man,  
With wing that smelt of Death,  
Has smeared a fairer span  
From the live soul beneath,  
Until it shudders again  
At the corrupted breath,  
That with fog cumbereth  
The mirror of the brain.

### III. RESURRECTIONEM MORTUORUM

14

**B**UT the moon rides; the taint  
Of Time and Death is gone.  
The spirits that are faint  
Tread their far roads alone.  
She, like some stronger saint  
New from oblivion,  
Her steadfast hand draws on,  
Hands firm, as carve or paint.

## BRASENOSE OLD QUAD

### 15

Now call not every verse  
Of heaven's rune profound  
Mortal remembrancers—  
Each gleam, or fingering sound,  
Each stem-blown leaf that stirs  
Above the phantom ground.  
The trees shall not seem round,  
Wood-carved inquisitors;

### 16

The seas shall not seem vast  
Siberias of Time,  
That passed them and repassed  
In unrelenting rhyme,  
Since worlds were born, aghast  
To feel his minutes chime:  
The fragrance of the lime  
Shall not seem overcast.

### 17

The golden fortresses  
Of every captain-soul,  
There, where the word distress,  
Unsacramental, stole,  
Have purged themselves, and press  
Battalions forth, their toll  
To pay, nor win their goal,  
But perish none the less.

## BRASENOSE OLD QUAD

18

They perish, but like lives  
In any other war,  
Their death a vigour gives,  
A manliness the more,  
To all that onward strives,  
And all that strove before—  
Brave bees still grouping store  
For unrespondent hives.

19

More, to the sun the moon  
Beholden for her beams,  
Moored like a blank balloon  
Athwart her own white streams,  
Is handsel of high noon.  
A kindly demon seems  
To rob night of our dreams  
With sunlight from the moon.

20

For of the sun and rain  
And the wild mountain-peace,  
The incense fumes again;  
Of floods in beechen ease  
Under a time-grey fane,  
And Cithaeronian trees,  
Dashed breathless by the breeze  
On Inchmagranachain.

## BRASENOSE OLD QUAD

### 21

An hour's eternity  
Is deep as heaven's wells,  
And beautiful to see  
Eyes where eternal dwells  
Delight won momentarily  
From swallow-flights, and bells,  
And tracks of deer in dells,  
Made verdurous by July.

### 22

So doth a draught of wind,  
Cooled in the land's cool breast,  
Nursed darkly out of mind  
Past many a tossing crest  
Of seas, far glades behind,  
Drive horror from the mind  
By throttling Time oppressed.

### 23

Sail, moon, rise quietly,  
Ride, moon, steal emerald  
From ocean, steal ruby  
From sunset. We have called  
Thy face eternity,  
Thy changing face, half-walled  
This time by towers, stalled  
Like priests against their sky.



## BRASENOSE OLD QUAD

24

Changing delight goes deep,  
And shallow's the sea of Death.  
O flowers, no more we weep  
That Time seals with his breath  
Your fulfilled buds. O leap,  
Ye hearts, this sky beneath,  
That beauty carrieth  
To morning, whilst ye sleep!

CHARLES PLUMB

SONG

THE dog-rose and the marguerite  
That on the brae do blow,  
I should compare to someone fair,  
Had it been long ago.

To prospects exquisitely planned  
That range on left and right  
I should refer, to credit her  
With more than their delight.

But now I have forgot her face,  
Her name I never knew:  
How can I praise her charming ways  
As I should like to do?

# BENJAMIN ROSENBAUM

## BROKEN LINES

NATURE cannot remain in rigid lines.  
She has too much of beauty. She must bend  
The stiff, stern postures of the oaks and pines,  
And she must curve the fallen leaves; distend  
The quiet sands to arcs in circling wind;  
Or sag an arrow nosing on sky-free.  
A cliff, defying mallets of the sea,  
Will lose its bronze will and be crushed and thinned  
Until it is a lifted cup, a bowl.  
Nature is like a sculptor, with strange stone,  
Who loves the broken: draperies wind-blown,  
A torso with a breast. Her cosmic soul  
Hungers for curves: a rising, wavering place,  
A gothic arch of dawn, an oval face.

INTO A QUIET, LONELY PLACE

**I**NTO a quiet, lonely place I come,  
 To a coign of cliff, a lane that drops to the sea:  
 The shrill voices of the winds have here  
 No place, nor the winds' fingers in my hair.  
 All that was before is strangely far,  
 And I have entered on a secret stillness:  
 A frightened hush falls on the throat that sang,  
 On the stream that babbled dreamily in the sun,  
 On whispering osiers and ivied stones,  
 There are a thousand timid eyes that watch  
 In the starked silence, only the monotone  
 Of gathered waves that break upon the shore  
 Below, lulls suspense with regular beat.  
 A sea-bird leaves his preening by the margin,  
 And rising through swift air, desolately  
 Wheels above the deserted shore, and now  
 Rousing from dreams I find my quiet nook  
 Beautiful with innumerable sounds:  
 The intimate brook resumes its idle chatter,  
 A little wind wakes among the withies;  
 The ivy-leaves that gleam like pools of light  
 Rustle softly over the stones, and even  
 The mosses are astir; a robin threads  
 The intricate hedge, and pipes a friendly song  
 Ere he flits mocking up the covert lane.

THE VILLAGE

IF one came back now from the vanished past  
Into this gleaming waste of sand and stone,  
Where walls are hard and bright and angular  
And the cold comfortable houses rise  
Upon the slopes where there were trees of old,  
How would he hold to that dim memory  
That haunts the sly recesses of his mind,  
Still and inviolate as a woodland pool?  
And I have come back from the vanished past  
To find my dream only a withered flower:  
For here, where the harsh noon-day glare lights up  
With pitiless whiteness the dust and desolation,  
Here was shadowy coolness under the elms,  
And under the elms that stood like sentinels  
Along the unforgotten way, there fell  
All through the dreaming summer afternoons,  
Dim veils of light upon the low grey roofs.

ERIC SCHROEDER

MY LOVE & I SAT KISSING BY A BANK

MY love and I sat kissing by a bank,  
Deep in the wood, deep in the summer morn.  
Beside us hung a beaded waterfall,  
Still to the eye, but carven to the ear  
With quiet chuckles and the clink of bells,  
Whose change and constancy my spirit, loth  
To render all, half-lifting from the arms  
Of a delight that begged another kiss  
And still another, till the sense be blind,  
Studied intently, anxious lest by Love  
All might be drowsed and bowed in servitude  
To one rich scene of earth, one mood, one sweet.  
So to the lutany of that thin stream  
I bent my ear, and on the wayward beech,  
Whose wary sprays parried the common sun  
Above our heads, with wide-eyed hope I looked,  
Believing I had light enough from Love  
To catch amid the throng of kindly saps  
Some true continual Ground, and clasp some Form  
Of mantling brightness that would serve me long:  
(Still flares the lit Mind through the stress of days  
Once wakened, and at dayflush stirring courts  
The sole touch that can breed new glories thick  
As winter stars.) Last, when the hour was dead  
And calm Necessity unwound our arms,

MY LOVE & I.

My Love, whose deepest joy, expressed in sobs  
And trembling smiles, transcends the palaces  
Of arching thought or word to which I climb  
By how elate and sounding stairs, arose •  
And walked before me swiftly through the wood.  
What light was on her face I could not tell  
Nor aught of her but only that she walked  
Breasting the living air of solitude  
As if I was a memory unlaid  
And half unwelcome.

Stumbling in her wake  
I ran towards our path, and tripped, and fell  
Headlong upon the powdery earth, my nails  
Dug in brown leaves and mould, and round my head  
A fence of twisted roots sprung up to dance.  
Why did she then not turn? I saw her move  
Unhearing on, and vanish in the green.  
What Being did I love? What had I lost?  
What Law of Love or Life had I transgressed?

A Terror of the wood and the whole world  
Struck through me, brain and limb, and cuffed me  
dumb,  
As I lay still and darkling on the path.  
I felt the boughs of all the forest smite  
Like lashes on my back, and dared not lift  
My face complaining to the furious trees,  
The voice, the glare, the cataract of wind.

## MY LOVE & I

An unremembered span I spent thus reft  
Of my strong self, when suddenly  
The howling fled, the twisting path lay still,  
The wood sprang back to sleep, and I was free.  
Yet lest I dare forget, as home I went  
I heard no insect stir, nor any bird,  
Sweet minstrel, gladdening other dells than mine  
In all that wood, so quiet as a grave.



## ROBERT SCOTT

### 'RANSCENDENTALISM

**Y**OU played with me: then I grew very wise,  
And learnt the worthlessness of haws and hips,  
And those soft negroes, with enormous lips,  
You bought; time even taught me to despise  
The swinging sabre on my Empire thighs,  
The cockle smallness of my crimson ships,  
Which slid to bath-tubs on their firewood slips,  
And postage-stamps, at last, and butterflies.

I read, marked, read again my Baudelaire,  
And learnt to dance: made formulas and friends,  
Invented Heaven, and wished that I were there,  
Then thought of newer means to ancient ends,  
And gaily played with ecstasy and pain.  
I think, change, lose, forget: but you remain.

RONALD McN. SCOTT

TO H. N. R.

WERE we twain Saints, O debonnair,  
Not so importunate I were:  
Or sinners twain were we, i' the pit  
Thou might'st at last thy love admit.  
But now, alack, when earth we leave  
Hell thee, me heaven, will not receive.

She slept one night within this room  
And lingereth still her faint perfume.  
So sweet, so sweet, so sweet that I  
Can scarcely sleep for ecstasy.  
God grant winged Time fan not away  
This air until my burial day.

Lady, not proudly do I claim  
My rhyme perpetuates thy name.  
For well I know that it can live  
Without what blazon I may give.  
Rather thy name will make my rhyme  
Immortal in despite of Time.

JAMES•R. SUTHERLAND

CHANG TAKES THE ROAD TO ETERNITY

**F**IVE weeks lay Chang a dying, but he died,  
And left a flat, shrunk body lapped in bed;  
And women wrung their tiny hands, and cried,  
And made obsequious clamour for Chang dead.  
But Chang passed thoughtfully through a lacquered door,  
The soul of Chang, a wisp of ether chill. . .

Nine days he groped in a grey mist, bleak and still,  
That drank the warm air like a sagging sponge;  
And in his ears there broke the hungry roar  
Of hidden waters, the cold plunge  
Of elbowing billows climbing some bouldered shore.  
And at the last there blew a deathly breeze,  
Such as will lift the clammy hair  
Of some sick dreamer foundering on his knees  
Down the warm tunnel of his dream. The air  
Was streaked with fitful sighs. The mist uprose.

Alas! and how shall I disclose  
The loneliness uncurtained by that breeze!  
The bleak, uneager desolation  
Filled the mind's compass like a dead man's eye.  
No voice of bird twitched the mute, palsied air;  
No daffodils shed their golden alchemy  
On wet, bright lawns. But sickly gorse was there  
Faint as mimosa when the moon is full.  
Flinty that road, lit by no wayside flower,  
Quick with no urchins straggling home from school.

## CHANG TAKES THE ROAD•

So mile by mile Chang trudged, and hour by hour.  
And at the end, beneath a rain-beat post,  
An old bent man he saw, a yammering ghost.

‘Death,’ said the post, pointing the way Chang came;  
But with a silent finger on ahead,  
‘Eternity,’ it said.

Chang lingered plaintively to read that name.

He saw the white peaks of Infinity

Gleam in the air like carven ivory,

And stooping, whispered to that chittering thing,

‘Why are you waiting here? Rise, and escape!’

The grey lips trembled suddenly agape:

The wind stood still to listen while they thought—

‘Why wait I here?’—Lank fingers snapped and caught

The empty air.—‘Why wait I here?’

Alas! I have forgot!’

And round the shoulder of a low-backed hill,

Chang heard a lapwing wailing faint but shrill.

Three times she called. And then the dreary wind

Froze to a final still.

# JAMES R. SUTHERLAND

## THE NEW *PRELUDE*

**I** BEING young, nor grown to man's estate,  
Gazed overmuch into the Ultimate,  
Parted red lips in droning psalm,  
Fed on grey holy books in shuttered calm.

But I got over that, being no fool,  
And made a shrill cult of the Beautiful.  
I grew a lonely lily in a pot,  
I bowed to Beauty that I revered not,  
I had vast longings, nameless blank desires,  
And beat upon my cage's finite wires.

And now that I am come to man's estate,  
I live no more by any antique rule;  
But dangling legs upon a sunny gate,  
I gaze no more into the Ultimate,  
Nor bow no longer to the Beautiful.

## ERIC WALTER WHITE

### PRAYER

**I** DO not pray at night before I sleep.  
What should I say?  
When I in solemn, rare, unbodied thought  
Communicate with God I do not weep  
My petty woes, at that which he hath wrought  
Disconsolate.  
Nor dare I beg and in the silent poise  
Of eternal workings introduce the cry  
Of my shrill voice.  
In ecstasy I rest, lonely and great,  
With mind sublime.  
There is no Time, no Matter, and no Fate.  
My thoughts upsoar and beat against the sky,  
The Infinite.  
Until at length, frightened, I can no more.  
To the brute plane I fall from spaceless height  
And my knees in fear and anguish cry,  
Strength, God, oh! strength.